THE EDUCATIONAL Forum

Lasting Leadership: A Study of High Leadership Capacity Schools

by Linda Lambert

Abstract

This report is about a study of high leadership capacity schools and those in the process of becoming such a school. Schools were selected for participation in the study based on the leadership capacity characteristics they possessed and evidence of improved and sustained student performance, professional cultures, and shared leadership dynamics. Analysis of the data examines the features, underlying factors, relationships, and patterns that contribute to leadership capacity for lasting school improvement. Ultimately, this is a story of educational leadership.

In the pursuit of a deeper understanding of leadership capacity, a few startling insights about the nature of leadership were discovered. Together, these understandings and insights constitute major findings toward the establishment of sustainable improvement in schools. The discoveries began with the stories of 15 schools—at all levels, located in different states and in Canada—that were serious about improving.

Most of the schools in the study, through shared leadership and a professional culture, have made improvements so that they no longer have the status of a low-performing school. Through networking, strength and hope in their own conversations, and district assistance, the schools achieved student and adult performance of which they could be proud. This was a study of the journey of these schools toward high leadership capacity, as well as a story of other schools that already possessed and sustained high student performance and leadership capacity. The study magnified understandings of principal and teacher leadership, while raising critical questions about the future of leadership in schools that sustain success.

Study Overview

Schools were nominated for inclusion in the study by the author and her colleagues who had worked with initiatives that emphasized the characteristics of high leadership capacity schools. The 15 schools that were chosen for participation in the study included 11 elementary schools, one junior high school, and three high schools (one of which was a charter school). Eight of the schools previously were low-performing schools located in urban areas, four were racially and ethnically diverse schools located in suburban areas, one was a non-diverse suburban school, and two schools were located in poor, rural communities.

The primary investigators included the schools' principals, who worked with staff members, directors of initiatives, external coaches, and the author. A set of open-ended questions invited participants to describe the leadership capacity of their schools, including obstacles and sustainability. In addition, two extensive conversations were held between primary investigators and individuals familiar with leadership capacity, yet not directly involved in the study. During the first conversation, the investigators presented their schools by describing the context in which they operated, their accomplishments, and their struggles. In the second conversation, investigators responded to a rough draft of the study, noting patterns, making inferences, and suggesting conclusions.

Leadership Capacity Study

Leadership capacity, in this context, means broad-based, skillful participation in the work of leadership (Lambert 1998; 2003) and a way of understanding sustainable school improvement. The concept derives its meaning from the substantive literature regarding school improvement and professional learning communities, and the correlation of these adult learning factors to student achievement. Leadership is understood as reciprocal, purposeful learning in community settings (Lambert et al. 1995; 1996; 2002).

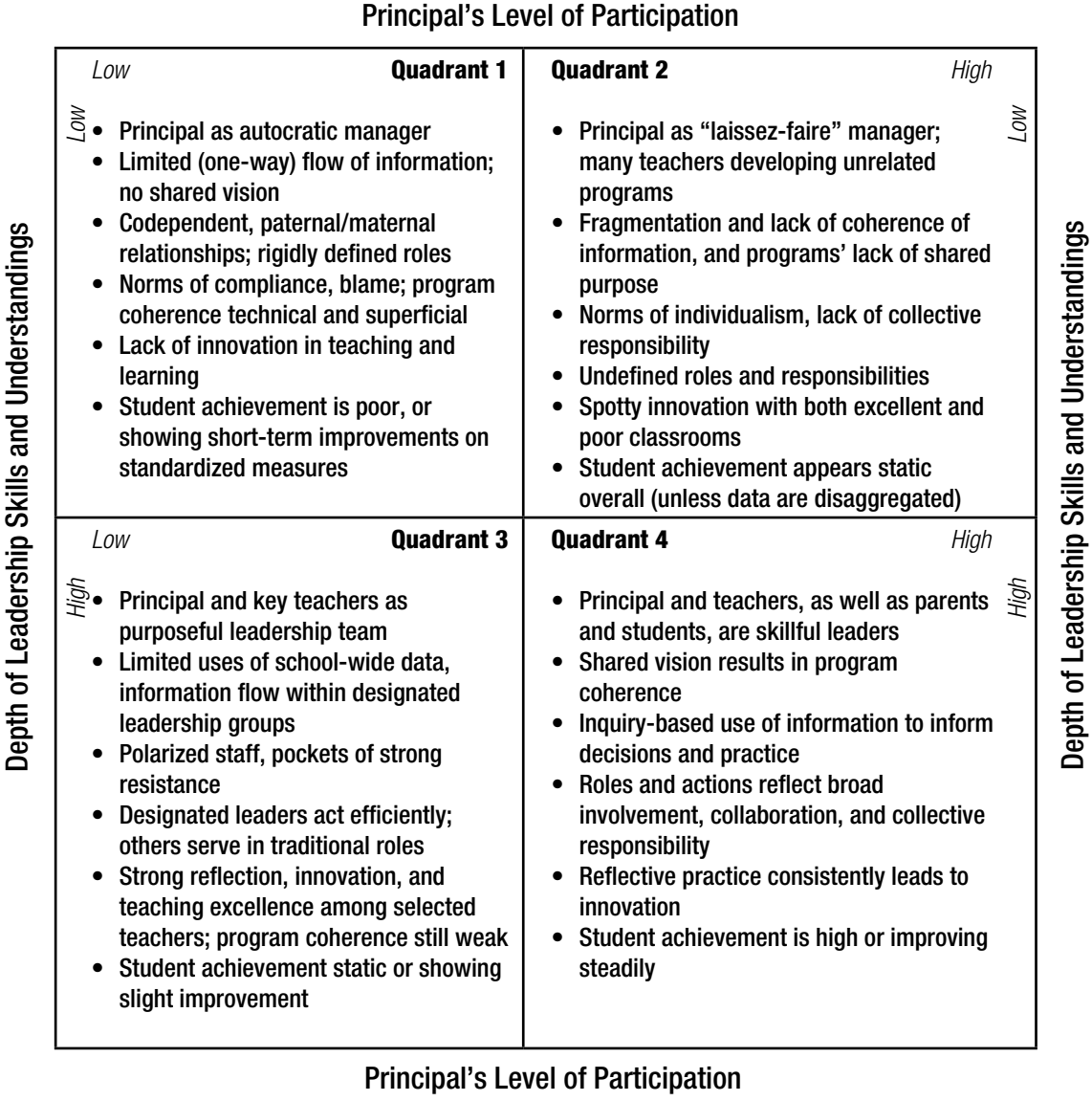
The characteristics of leadership capacity frame four school types that can be described by the intersection of participation and skillfulness (see Figure 1). Each characteristic is evidenced in its desired form—that is, the form described by identified research studies in school improvement—in Quadrant 4. These characteristics include the role of the principal and others in leadership positions in collaboration, problem solving, decision making, professional learning, conversations, vision/purpose and coherence, information and inquiry, relationships, and student performance. Glickman (1993), Fullan (1993), Heifetz (1995), Newmann and Wehlage (1995), Schmoker (1996), Garmston and Wellman (1997), Lambert (1998; 2003), and Newmann, King, and Youngs (2000) all provide useful resources in understanding Quadrant 4 features.

The presence, configuration, intensity, and quality of these characteristics conspire to form the leadership capacity of schools. Quadrants 1–3 are inferred from Quadrant 4 based on school interviews, observations, and case studies.

The findings from this study tell a story of schools that were working toward high

leadership capacity. These schools stopped at nothing to improve student learning. Beginning with an understanding of student strengths and needs, conversations were efficacious and creative. These educators and parents did not accept limitations when planning for their children; their discussions precluded statements about boundaries or hopelessness. No school rested on its laurels, nor suggested that its journey toward the improvement of student performance was complete.

Figure 1: Leadership Capacity of Four School Types



Approaches for addressing student performance exceeded expectations, both in conception—performance evaluation methods other than test scores—and in responsiveness—acting in anticipation of student changes. For example, at Lincoln High

School in San Francisco, California, student performance was measured through exhibits, rubrics, portfolios, and assessments within courses and across four school-wide outcomes—personal responsibility, social responsibility, critical thinking, and communication. Harrison Elementary School in Houston, Texas, refused to be corralled by the state's emphasis on tests, and instead used rubrics, portfolios, self-assessments, and running records to secure a deep understanding of student performance.

Cavalier Elementary School in Cavalier, North Dakota, began a preschool program with an emphasis on literacy and secured a 21st Century Learning Community grant to hire ten extra reading teachers. Eden Gardens Elementary School in Asheville, North Carolina, shunned the temptation to be complacent based on high-performance results and developed "Beyond Our Fours" thinking to push students beyond the top rung of a four-point rubric. In anticipation of the changing demographics in the school, Eden Gardens' staff members studied *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (Payne 1996) to prepare themselves for new challenges. Sarason Elementary School in Cupertino, California, already had achieved high scores—a California API ranking that improved from 792 to 852 in two years. That school continued to climb by using *Mosaic of Thought: Teaching Comprehension in a Reader's Workshop* (Keene and Zimmerman 1997) in study groups and emphasizing writing as a value-added dimension to student learning.

Leadership capacity means broad-based, skillful participation in the work of leadership and a way of understanding sustainable school improvement.

In high leadership capacity schools, student leadership is considered vital to student performance. Teachers at schools in this study explicitly taught and modeled leadership understandings and skills, and governance structures provided extensive opportunities for participation. At Lincoln High School, Harrison Elementary School, Caravell High School in Redwood City, California, and Garson Elementary School in Newark, California, students were involved in action research with faculty. At Garnett Elementary School in San Leandro, California, students served as liaisons with other students, were involved in conflict resolution, and provided input on critical issues such as attendance and suspension. At Johnson Junior High School in Columbia, Missouri, student cadres invited feedback from their peers to share with the school's steering committee. Students also were directly involved in developing and monitoring the school's vision. At Garson Elementary School, the voices of "focal students"—traditionally underserved youth—were solicited to keep the school on course with continuous improvement for all students.

At Kelly Elementary School in Miami, Ohio, students helped develop the school's vision and norms, and assumed responsibility for translating the school's purpose

to the community. The students also planned school celebrations and community events.

Each of the schools in the study boasted significantly improved and sustained student performance for four to ten years. However, each school struggled with performance differences among subgroups despite a focus on their more vulnerable children. Several schools, most notably Cavalier Elementary, Garnett Elementary, Vantage Elementary School in Richmond, California, and Lincoln High School, adopted and adapted an equity pedagogy to help support higher achievement among historically underserved students by focusing on scaffolding, student discourse, and reciprocal teaching.

Conceptual Frameworks for School Improvement

Each school shared a clear conceptual framework for school improvement with clearly outlined strategies. Each conceptual framework included the elements of school improvement described by the concept of leadership capacity. The welcome convergence of today's knowledge about school improvement meant that several initiatives supported and complemented one another. For example, three of the schools in the study were members of the Accelerated Schools network, which includes leadership capacity as one of its goals and emphasizes unity of purpose, building on strengths, and the belief that everyone is a part of the process. The Child Development Project promotes beliefs about children and adults that underlie strong school improvement, while First Things First emphasizes sustainable relationships through vertical learning communities and looping, the use of student achievement evidence, and a professional culture. Other improvement projects have been initiated by schools or districts based on understandings from research literature, graduate programs, and school coaches.

The transitional phase is the process of letting go—releasing authority and control—while continuing to provide support and coaching.

These congruent concepts of school improvement involve team structures, such as communities or cadres of staff members, parents, and students, in activities that enhance relationships, participation, and skillfulness. Everyone is on a team, whether it is a leadership team, a vertical or horizontal grade team, a vision team, an action research team, etc. Everyone participates by engaging in conversations about student performance and questions of practice. Vision, beliefs, and values guide the development and implementation of initiatives that are congruent with the overall mission of the school.

The conversations or dialogue of teams at the schools in this study usually were constructivist in nature. They discussed assumptions and beliefs, inquired into practice, tried to make sense of what they found, and framed new or improved actions. At Garson Elementary School, these constructivist conversations were referred to as PEP (peer enquiry process). At Johnson Junior High School, these conversations took place in interconnected and articulated teams, such as leadership teams, steering committees, and professional learning communities embedded within departments.

As teacher leadership evolves and the principal takes on a lower profile, is it possible—even desirable—to live without a principal?

Approaches to problem solving revealed a strong sense of collective responsibility. For example, when the vice principal position was eliminated at Toledo Elementary School in Calgary, Canada, and at Garson Elementary School, staff members decided how to redistribute the tasks among themselves.

In most of the schools in the study, a high number of staff members were involved in outside networks, graduate programs, or the national teacher certification process. These special initiatives or networks nearly always included an external coach or consultant. For example, at Johnson Junior High School and at Kelly and Harrison Elementary Schools, the outside consultant served as a coach, trainer, friend, mentor, broker of services and visits, and coordinator of the network. Within the Midwest City School District in Kansas City, Kansas, a school improvement facilitator from the First Things First program was assigned to each school.

These external coaches became trusted confidantes, to whom the principal and teachers turned for support, advice, and information. The external coach was an important force that moved energy and dissonance through the system much like a small boat disrupts the tranquility of a lake. Internally, such a fluctuation often was caused by a strong and insistent staff member (such as the principal), a crisis, or student data revealing low performance.

Evolving Phases toward Lasting School Improvement

The characteristics and understandings of principals in schools that have high leadership capacity or are moving actively in that direction are strikingly similar. These individuals are characterized by:

- a clarity of self and values;
- strong beliefs in democracy;
- strategic thinking about the evolution of school improvement;
- a deliberate and vulnerable persona;

- knowledge of the work of teaching and learning; and
- an ability for developing capacity in others and in the organization.

Based on this study, three major phases in a principal's development as a school moves toward high leadership capacity have been identified: instructive, transitional, and high capacity. Figure 2 describes principals' behaviors at each phase of development. Note that these phases applied when a principal entered a low or moderately low leadership capacity school; but when a principal entered a moderately high or high leadership capacity school, his or her approach was quite different.

Instructive Phase

The instructive phase is typically a period of organization, focus, and establishing or initiating previously nonexistent collaborative structures and processes (e.g., teams, a school vision, examination of data, shared expectations, and processes for working together). This stage is also a period of holding on (Kegan 1982)—providing early protection and support so that relationships and identities can begin to shift into new patterns. Teacher behaviors vary greatly, but they often are dependent or resistant during the early stages of school improvement.

As leadership capacity grew, teachers experienced a personal and collective journey from dependency to high levels of self-organization.

In the instructive phase, the principal and other formal leaders may insist on paying attention to results, convening conversations, solving miasmic problems, challenging assumptions, confronting incompetence, focusing on goals, establishing structures and processes that engage others, teaching new practices, and articulating beliefs that may find their way into the fabric of a school's thinking. For most principals in this study, such displays of strength were strategic—they understood capacity building and felt the need to jump start the process of moving their schools out of low leadership capacity status.

One deliberate strategy in the instructive phase is called pacing and leading the community, or walking alongside of and being empathic, so that community members know they are understood before asking a question or going in a new direction. The principal at Vantage Elementary School consciously matched cultural experiences and behaviors, listened to, and led community members in solving the deep problems that besieged the school.

Little data from this study exists about teachers during this phase other than principals' recollections of resistance, disengagement, and dependence. One high school principal struggled with the subtle and not-so-subtle aspects of dependence displayed

Figure 2: Principal's Behaviors in Leadership Capacity Development

Instructive Phase	**Transitional Phase**	**High Leadership Capacity Phase**
Principal as teacher, sponsor, director	***Principal as guide, coach***	***Principal as colleague, critical friend, mentor***
Personal attributes and behaviors: • Learns continually • Thinks strategically • Value/vision driven • Sets norms with staff • Supervises/ensures staff accountability • Convenes conversations • Honors history • Sponsors staff growth • Accepts responsibility • Breaks dependencies • Clarifies roles • Articulates strategies • Involves others in decision making • Creates safe, "holding" environment	Personal attributes and behaviors: • Learns—attends to epiphanies • Thinks strategically • Translates values into vision language • Lets go, provides support, and sticks around • Scaffolds with ideas and questions • Mediates roles • Develops structures that build reciprocal relationships • Coaches for instructional improvement	Personal attributes and behaviors: • Learns continually • Thinks strategically • Value/vision driven • Continues and expands behaviors initiated in earlier phases
Instructs staff (or arranges for instruction) in: • collaboration, group processes, and teaming; • conversation and dialogue; • inquiry/data use; • trust building; • best instructional practices; • communication skills; • facilitation; • conflict resolution; and • accountability	Guides staff to: • develop shared vision; • establish process observation of norms; • participate in leadership; • use inquiry; • question assumptions; • conduct constructivist conversations; • identify and solve problems; • surface/mediate conflict; • find resources (time, professional development, monies); and • plan	Participates with other members of the community to: • think strategically; • share concerns/issues; • share decisions; • monitor and implement shared vision; • engage in reflective practices (reflection/inquiry/dialogue/action); • monitor norms and take self-corrective action; • build a culture of interdependency; • self-organize; • diversify and blend roles; • establish criteria for self-accountability; • share authority and responsibility (dependent on expertise and interest, rather than role); and • plan for enculturation of new staff and succession
Uses formal authority to convene and maintain conversations, challenge complacency or incompetence, and make certain decisions	Uses formal authority to sustain conversations, insist on a professional development and inquiry agenda, mediate the demands of the district and state, and set reform pace	Uses formal authority to implement community decisions, mediate political pressures, work with less than competent staff, and work on legal and reform challenges

by his staff members. He recounted teachers saying, "You just tell us your vision for the school and we'll act on it." This statement is indicative of teachers' attitudes in low leadership capacity schools and is consistent with the experiences of the author when working with schools throughout the United States and Canada.

Two principals in this study were in the instructive phase; yet, their staff members were ready for a leader in the high capacity phase. Though the principals did the right things, they did them in the wrong ways. Right things included setting boundaries, encouraging participation, expecting accountability, and rewarding teacher decision making. However, they instructed the teachers in the actions to take and maintained tight control of the outcomes. The teachers in these schools were mature, involved in graduate programs, helpful to young teachers, worked earnestly at peer coaching and collaboration, and created lateral, nested professional communities. They needed a principal that recognized their capacities for self-governance.

Cavalier Elementary School, a school in the instructive phase, set the scene for transition. The principal assumed responsibility for ensuring that the teachers, as members of a collaborative team, realized the school's vision and focus. She suggested, "Leadership and vision flow into the community from the principal, and community members become part of making the vision happen. Every job description at Cavalier Elementary School involves taking part in leadership." Teachers taught one other, developed curriculum, and observed and discussed instructional strategies. Student achievement improved significantly, and teachers' behaviors indicated that they were ready to assume more responsibility for visioning and goal setting. To move into and through the next phase—the transitional phase—the principal needed to release some of the reins of power.

Transitional Phase

The transitional phase is the process of letting go—releasing authority and control—while continuing to provide support and coaching. This is a critical phase in the road to high leadership capacity—knowing where the culture is going and when to pull back as teachers emerge into leaders. The transitional phase is probably the most challenging for principals because the range of teacher development is at its widest.

In this study, teachers' emergence into leadership occurred at varying rates; many were ready to think differently about their work and expand their identities to include teacher leadership, while others moved more cautiously and deliberately. Some teachers still expected and wanted an instructive principal, while others were transforming into more independent professionals. Yet another group of teachers, already at a high leadership capacity phase, displayed self-organizing behaviors.

The transitional phase is a period of epiphanies and turning points for both principals and teachers. For example, when Caravell High School was identified as a low-performing school by the California State Department of Education, the principal laid out the harsh reality of that status and shared the responsibility for improvement with staff members. She said, "I don't know what to do. We'll have to figure this out

together." Through a focus on strong collaborations and peer conversations to diminish the reliance on formal authority, they did.

During the third year of her tenure, this same principal's husband died of cancer. Teachers filled in—not missing a beat. As she reflected on that time and her own transformation, she described herself as being more aware of her assumptive thinking, accepting of impermanence, and having an empowering belief in the importance of helping others discover who they are.

Principals used both direct and subtle approaches to encourage staff members to become leaders. The principal at Garson Elementary School realized that she needed to rally the energies and diminishing self-respect of teachers to build their confidence and move forward. She deliberately used longitudinal student data to demonstrate that the school had made progress. She also framed the need to address achievement gaps more aggressively. She said, "Just remember that a change in practice or instruction will always come from the outside if you don't allow it to come from your own action research." Identifying such a consequence encouraged and clarified matters for the teachers.

The principal of Toledo Elementary School described her strategic thought processes and vulnerability:

Being a principal in a school is a work in progress. The work of learning will never be completed because this is a dynamic role—a role based on human relationships. These relationships are constantly being created and negotiated. During my first year, I intentionally engaged the individuals with whom I work. I worked on creating a climate of trust. The accomplishments of staff members were recognized by me and, eventually, by others. My leadership in this area shifted from me to reside within others.

If principals can be prepared to hold fast to values while letting go of power and authority, schools are more likely to attain lasting school improvement.

The principal at Garson Elementary School described the transition in this way:

Just recently, I believe we've turned the corner. The last three staff development programs have been conducted primarily by Vision Team members. Questions in our staff development sessions have been deep and meaningful. People are not afraid to take risks. People are staying late to meet with colleagues to discuss professional growth without me prompting the meeting. My role has changed significantly. People don't line up to ask me questions. They ask one another. This type of

growth means as much to me, if not more, as the quantitative scores. Actually, this type of growth was probably harder. It's like grabbing fog.

The willingness of the principal to be vulnerable—to be open to the impermanence of his role—is a crucial perspective during the transitional phase and evokes teacher participation. When teachers in this study became aware that the principal didn't have all of the answers, they actively moved toward more participation.

At a fall staff meeting, the principal at Vantage Elementary School declared, "I am a racist. I need your support to work through this." She was vulnerable. She was authentic. The staff responded well and began a four-year journey into a deeper understanding of their beliefs and assumptions about race, ethnicity, and poverty.

One of the most challenging aspects of the transitional phase is the need to break through dependencies. Dependencies often happen in a culture where teachers need to ask the principal's permission and expect the principal to make the decisions and take care of them. When a principal is aware of the danger of dependencies and strategic about the developmental process, several deliberate strategies can be used. In the lower-performing schools in this study, where dependencies are most apt to be found, principals refused to retain authority and power, and instead coached and led for teacher efficacy and forced teachers to make decisions and solve problems.

Through networking, strength and hope in their own conversations, and district assistance, the schools achieved student and adult performance of which they could be proud.

The transitional phase is characterized by principals easing out or letting go, as teachers' initiative and responsibility increase. Often, during the early stages of the transitional phase, the principal must provide sustained support and tenacity. During this time, a temptation exists to abandon the effort because it seems too difficult to achieve. Support involves encouraging conversations, adhering to the process rather than giving way to quick fixes, coaching, and problem solving within an atmosphere of trust and safety.

In this study, external coaches also had significant roles—observing, coaching, and advising—during the transitional phase. At Kelly Elementary School, when teachers felt that they were losing momentum under the guidance of a new principal, they asked the external coach to intervene and bring life back to their school improvement process. The external coach did so by working closely with the new principal and by meeting and planning with teachers.

The transitional phase gives way to the high leadership capacity phase when reintegration and self-organization are nearly achieved. However, no clean borders exist when each phase begins and ends. Rather, behaviors emerge, dissolve, and sometimes reappear in the struggle for capacity.

High Leadership Capacity Phase

During the high leadership capacity phase, the principal's profile becomes lower. The principal leads from the center or side with an emphasis on facilitating and coparticipation rather than dominance. Teachers' influence and actions begin to converge with those of the principals, as both groups become more reciprocal in their behaviors and conversations. This convergence permits a reintegration of new behaviors and relationships.

In this study, principals in the high leadership capacity phase displayed many of the qualities and skills that helped them succeed in the previous two phases: caring and collaboration, a capacity for introspection and personal learning, belief in the capabilities of others to learn, strategic thinking, self-governance, and a commitment to social justice. However, behaviors were somewhat different in this phase. The principal relinquished and shared critical roles and responsibilities, while teachers had a more dominant role in initiating new actions and posing critical questions.

Strikingly, principals and teachers became more alike than different. As teachers self-organized, initiating and self-responsible behaviors emerged. Relationships became more level as reciprocity developed between the principal and teachers. With reciprocity, teachers found their voices, grew confident in their beliefs, and became more open to feedback. The principals no longer had to facilitate the conversations, frame the problems, or challenge assumptions in isolation. Principals and teachers began to share the same concerns and work together toward their resolution.

The principals at Lincoln High School and Sarason Elementary School, and Easton High School in Seattle, Washington, began their tenure in moderate to high leadership capacity schools. These individuals were carefully selected to carry forth the spirit and behaviors that had brought the schools to this point. The principal at Easton High School explained:

> *I view myself as simply one small part of the wheel that turns; at times, I am the hub; at other times, one of the spokes; and at yet at other times, the rim that meets the road. I believe in the intrinsic good of people and look at my job as helping them to see that within themselves.*

The principal at Lincoln High School observed:

> *I'm trying to lead for when I may not be here any longer—by building both systems (through school design choices) and people's capacity for leadership—both of these focused on holding and progressing toward the vision. We have to strengthen both the vision and people's capacity to lead toward that vision.*

Kelly Elementary School is an example of a school that moved through the three growth phases. When the principal was hired, the school was the lowest performing school in the city and was under threat of closure. During her three-year tenure, the principal built trusting relationships by tearing down the boundaries among personal and professional roles. Retreats were held on a houseboat. Student learning became the focus. New teachers were hired and mentored into the new environment. The principal assumed a strong lead initially, but then encouraged strong collaboration. Two staff members overcame their initial resistance and began to participate when they were convinced that student achievement was improving. As mentioned previously, when a new principal was hired, the teachers became concerned that they were losing momentum and asked their external coach for assistance. Today, with a new half-time principal, the school is a high leadership capacity school.

Most principals in this study understood capacity building and felt the need to jump start the process of moving their schools out of low leadership capacity status.

Schools without Principals

As teacher leadership evolves and the principal takes on a lower profile, is it possible—even desirable—to live without a principal? If so, when is a school ready to operate without a principal? An intriguing criterion of a high leadership capacity school is its ability to thrive without a principal, whether or not this is the chosen action.

Many reasons exist for having a principal. One person more readily can take responsibility for convening and facilitating conversations, securing focus, and monitoring and working through difficulties that have personnel or legal implications. Leadership skills are important, and a person who has such skills can teach and model them for others. District personnel often are more comfortable with a principal as the school's main contact, contract manager, and legal representative. Further, the principal continues to be the most crucial factor in school improvement because unless the school possessed high leadership capacity before the principal arrived, teacher behavior is largely a function of principal behavior.

Principals, however, are often mobile, transferred, or reassigned before the transitional phase is complete and their schools achieve high leadership capacity. A new principal may possess a style or vision incongruent with lasting school improvement.

Even when an effective principal sticks around, his or her goal should be to increase people's capacity for leadership. When staff members enter a state of self-organization,

they can outlast and perhaps energize a marginal principal as well as sustain school improvement. Self-organization occurs when new roles and structures (e.g., webbed or nested communities, teaming) are formed by the participants, and initiating and self-responsible behaviors emerge that are not dependent on external direction.

As principals lead toward teacher self-organization, they create multiple interlocking groups, teams, or communities in which the conversations stimulate critical thought. For example, schools with leadership teams, reading groups, vertical teams, and learning communities evoke disparate ideas and dissonance that challenge assumptions and project new possibilities. Within two years of such a richly textured professional life, teachers will begin to self-organize. Teachers in a self-organizing state find leaders in one another, assigning both credibility and authority to their peers. They leverage mutual authority by expecting others to initiate and bring problems to the group. Within nested communities, teachers learn and draw energy and authority from one other. When teachers self-organize, the principal can leave without regrets.

With or without a principal, the teachers in this study who performed at a high level of personal and professional capacity tended also to become involved in external opportunities, networks, and graduate programs. Often they moved on to other positions, but their departures didn't adversely affect their school's improvement. Though Toledo Elementary School closed at the end of 2003 following an extensive redistricting process, teachers' professional contributions continued in their new settings. Riverside Elementary School in Black Mine, California, has been a high leadership capacity school without a principal for seven years. Kelly Elementary School has a part-time principal and, the district leadership believes, could probably do without a principal.

Inferences and Implications

At the outset of this article, it was mentioned that this study revealed a few startling discoveries. As leadership capacity grew, teachers experienced a personal and collective journey from dependency to high levels of self-organization, and demonstrated a readiness to lead a school without a principal. This study further suggested that schools moving toward high leadership capacity had noticeable internal cohesion. These interdependent features included a comprehensive conceptual framework, improved and sustained student performance, broadly distributed and skilled leadership, vision and value-driven work, and a professional culture in which collaboration is critical and reflection, inquiry, and dialogue are used. As the schools moved through the three phases of leadership capacity—instructive, transitional, and high leadership capacity—the roles of administrators, teachers, parents, and students changed, as did the relationships within and among these individuals. The culture of the organizations also changed as schools evolved and became positioned for sustained improvement regardless of personnel.

In addition to the identification of developmental phases, other findings from the study included:

- Teachers' roles and identities were key factors in the evolutionary phases. As they transitioned, teachers assumed greater collective responsibility, self-organized,

and were able to lead without a principal's guidance. The notion that schools can sustain school improvement without a principal is an intriguing concept.

- Sustained internal or external support was critical while teachers transitioned, making it important for principals to remain in their positions during reintegration. This is an important consideration as school districts consider their succession practices and policies.
- Reintegration occurred on the organizational level as well. These schools—a collective entity consisting of personnel, students, and parents—became increasingly strategic, bold, clearly focused, efficacious, and often insubordinate.
- Conceptual frameworks broadened as people worked together in new ways and shared their cumulative knowledge and skills. For example, though reflective practice may have started with an examination of quantitative and standardized data, constructivist conversations, evaluations of student work, action research, and peer coaching filled out the framework's inquiry requirement.
- Though the schools in the study ranged from urban schools with high poverty and ethnic and language diversity to affluent, suburban schools with little or no diversity, the unfolding of lasting improvement did not differ markedly. Two primary differences were: conversations about race and ethnicity were more direct in urban schools; and low performance on state assessments, which forced public and district attention on the schools, provoked radical action toward change.
- Roles evolved so that they were blended rather than sharply separate. Viewpoints, skills, and actions became more alike; and tasks that traditionally were performed by the principal could be performed by any number of people within the school. Many roles and tasks were fulfilled collectively. Diversification of roles is an important dimension of the fabric of sustainability.
- Contextual issues, such as school location, size, and grade levels, affected high leadership capacity. Location—whether the school was in an urban, suburban, or rural area—influenced resources, accountability pressure, diversity, and parental concerns. Grade levels related directly to the complexity of structures (e.g., number and type of teams) and parental leadership. Small size allowed for more intimacy and organization.
- District leadership actions that involved guidance, expertise, time, and other resources were significant factors in the schools' success. In many cases, districts either provided or supported conceptual frameworks for school improvement, making time available for professional development and collaborative work in the form of shortened or full days.
- The flow of ideas and new relationships from networking opportunities energized participants. Regional conferences, seminars, meetings, and coaching, as well as committees and graduate cohorts, were used to encourage these exchanges.

Conclusion

Sustainability, though receiving a great deal of attention in recent years, continues to be the most confounding problem in human organizations. Education is no exception. If anything, the complexity of the product—student learning—and bureaucratic limitations place education more at risk.

In this study, leadership capacity was considered to be reciprocal, purposeful learning

in communities. Lasting leadership was intended to be not only reciprocal and purposeful, but also to embody learning that is a lasting, continuing facet of sustainability. Learning occurred in social groups, allowing participants to connect in new and complex ways, and thereby inspiring critical thought and energizing self-organization. When learning is continuous and participation in that learning is broad-based and skillful, high leadership capacity and the potential of sustainable, lasting school improvement result.

This study provided depth to these understandings and hope for their realization. University professional preparation programs can discover important organizational and curricular ideas from research. If principals can be prepared to hold fast to values while letting go of power and authority, schools are more likely to attain lasting school improvement. Companion understandings for teacher education are that teachers should be prepared to function as full participants and leaders in the school community, attend to the learning of both children and adults, and enter into collegial relationships with principals.

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